

Monday, April 9, 2007

Telcons: MHH, Lynn Woolsey

MHH didn't know Hillary's interview with NYT of March 13 (reported March 14), but as I described it, he agreed that it was his position. He had no direct influence on it; arrived at independently. (I should have asked who he thought her advisers were; and who else held this position).

He wants to hold a base in the Kurdish area (Kirkuk?) aimed at keeping the Kurds from taking over Kirkuk completely, and thus bringing in the Turks (and possibly Iran and Syria, in a war). This the Kurds would probably allow; they wouldn't like it, but wouldn't oppose it. Whereas if we left they would take Kirkuk...

He would hold onto, and protect, the Green Zone: to maintain a central Iraqi government, which would not be (as it would probably be if we left) anti-US, anti-Israel (pro-(Iranian), would not be ad-Sadr (probable ruler if we left), would have the objective of Shia-Sunni reconciliation (? Does the present government really aim at this, beyond lip-service?).

He wants to maintain a government that is not opposed to US interests in the Middle East. (What are these? How bad would it be if they did "oppose" our "interests"? What right do we have to maintain such a government, by occupation?

He thinks that recruiting for AQ would not go down if we got out altogether; they could claim "victory." He now thinks that our "retreats" since Reagan probably have led to encouragement of AQ (though he didn't know of AQ at the time): including even our withdrawal from Lebanon, and definitely our withdrawal from Somalia. (?)

On the other hand, he thinks their appeal to recruits would be reduced if we reduced our presence in Iraq, kept a lower profile, didn't intervene in sectarian fighting; even though we maintained an occupation. There will probably be some ethnic cleansing of Sunnis in Baghdad if we stay—as bystanders (sustainable, he thinks: like Hillary)—but not nearly as bad as if we left.

Another objective: to keep there from being open AQ bases in Anbar, as in Afghanistan. Thus, maintain a US capability and "right" (?) to raid such camps. I ask: Isn't the fighting against us the best possible training for them right now, as well as a recruitment inducement? He seems to think open bases would be worse. (?) Why not let the Iraqis take care of that? He thinks they wouldn't bother them, so long as the AQ bases didn't attack them.

The anti-Israeli government he fears if we left (an Israeli fear?) would support Hezbollah and Hamas... (What is his view of what should happen on Palestine? He didn't want to open that up).

He might keep just the bases of the Green Zone and in Kirkuk. Leave the South alone. Hasn't thought about other bases.

On Iran: Can Congress really block an attack on Iran that AIPAC wants? "Good question." But he isn't sure that AIPAC, or Israel, really wants an attack on Iran; they don't want to undercut the threat, for negotiations. Do they really think negots have any promise (without US concessions!)? Doesn't know.

He still thinks the probability of an attack is around 20%, given Gates' opposition to it. How to lower it? Congress keep pressure (?) on.

But a free-standing bill in the House wouldn't block it, because there's no chance of getting a free-standing bill to the floor in the Senate. In the House it takes only a majority to get a vote. In the Senate, it takes 60 votes. They call it a filibuster, but it doesn't involve holding the floor, as it used to (with 60 votes needed to cut off debate). For the last ten years or so, (as I understood him, not necessarily correctly), if there is an objection to a vote, it takes 60 votes to get a vote on a bill: which is impossible, for this, given the Republicans.

What can happen is to attach the Iran provision to the Defense Authorization (or later, Appropriations), i.e. a bill that has to come to a vote.

Why was it killed in the Supplemental. "The Jews." "i.e., AIPAC." They wanted the president to have the threat; [i.e., they wanted to override Art. I, section 8, for purposes of "negotiation"]. (What was the original intent of Congress with respect to the President's ability to THREATEN to initiate war?)

[GENERAL PROBLEM; GIVING THE PRESIDENT MAXIMUM FREEDOM OF ACTION TO THREATEN WAR, FOR PURPOSES OF 'NEGOTIATION,' WITHOUT GIVING HIM TOTAL FREEDOM ACTUALLY TO INITIATE WAR? Doesn't that actually encourage the president to forego exploration of real concessions and compromises that would avoid war, while relying instead on the threat of war? (as in Iran, and earlier North Korea?)

[To Klare, Jurasz, MHH: Does the US—as distinct from imperialists, neocons, oil corps, MIC—have "interests in the ME" which would be damaged by lack of occupation of Iraq, or by giving up an imperial presence there? What are they? How demanding are they? What are practical alternatives when it comes to satisfying those interests?]

Lynn Woolsey:

Arguments against letting the Lee-Woolsey-Waters bill come to a vote: Then we would have to let the Republicans add amendments (to which I think LW commented, "That's baloney." So, what was the real reason?) "The 'moderate' Democrats would offer their own amendment, which might pass." They wanted moderate Democrat votes.

All the freshman Democrats voted for the supplemental; though most of them had been elected by support of the progressives, not Emmanuel. (LW was mad at this; though it doesn't seem to me to have been a bad result, given what she agreed was a false representation of the supplemental by the media).

"I don't see how someone who says they want the war to end could vote \$100 billion for the war, or another dollar for it. " But what makes her "sick to the stomach" are the Democrats who say they "can't lose" on this exchange, because a presidential veto gives him clearcut responsibility for the war, in 2008, from which Dems will benefit. She says, "But he already has full responsibility for the war!" (It means, I think, that they really are glad to see the war go on through then, with his full responsibility; they don't want to be blamed for ending it, or for short-changing the troops; but his successor isn't going to want to be blamed either, nor the Congress after 2008; so it will go on.) Meanwhile, "they're dying over there."

There were no promises of a vote on the Lee bill (in return for voting for the supplemental). However, there were promises of a vote, within two or three weeks (?) on a free-standing bill on Iran, after it was removed from the supplemental.

It's necessary for Jews to challenge AIPAC. They are very hard to oppose. 6200 attended their conference, including LW ("had to attend briefly").

[WHAT WOULD A US/ISRAELI ATTACK ON IRAN DO TO THE FUTURE PROSPECTS OF ISRAEL: SAY, EFFECTS ON IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION, AND INVESTMENT, IF IRAN BEGAN A CRASH NUC PROGRAM OUTSIDE THE NPT, AND GIVEN TOTAL ME HOSTILITY, CHANGES IN REGIMES?]

On impeachment: LW: "What the chance that people who just voted for the Supplemental will impeach Bush?" However, she does think investigations are possible.

On Iran: She hopes that Saudi Arabia will oppose an attack on Iran.

Friday, March 9, 10 AM PST

Next day's thoughts on the supplemental controversy

A surprise in the papers this morning: According to both the Times and the SF Chronicle, the leaders' bill DOES contain a ban on funding for an Iran attack, without Congressional authorization! True? I'd like to see a copy of the draft bill. Other stories indicate that some Democrats object to this ban, as hurting Israeli security. (To allow only the Congress, not the president, to put this threat on the table, or to carry it out?!) If that doesn't stay in the draft as approved by the subcommittee, it should certainly be allowed to come to a floor vote as an amendment (as Webb is proposing in the Senate); in addition, if that fails, to being presented as stand-alone legislation.

The Lee bill does seem VERY preferable to the leaders' bill, for reasons I will mention briefly below and elaborate later. It seems VERY important to get a floor vote on it. However (especially if the Iran rider is in—despite the likelihood of veto or signing statement, it's a genuine marker by Congress, and none too soon) I don't see what's lost if those progressives who want to, vote for the leaders' bill after they have had their vote on the Lee bill, and thus having established a clear record of opposition to continuing the war vs. withdrawal starting now (as large a vote as possible, all stops pulled out).

To get a floor vote, do they all have to promise in advance to vote for the other? Isn't it enough for the leaders of the Progressive and Out-of-Iraq caucuses to say beforehand that their members can vote their consciences, after making a maximum effort on the floor vote on the Lee bill? That way Waters, Lee, Woolsey and others (up to fifteen altogether?) could still make an issue by voting no, without dooming the leaders' bill.

Maybe I'm missing something here. If so, I'd like to hear (this is not a challenge) what the advantage is in rejecting the leaders' bill after having had a vote on the Lee bill. I would like to know (I know everyone is super-busy, but maybe we could talk on the phone) what exactly happens if the leaders' bill fails to pass. Maybe this is elementary, but I just don't know. How bad is that, or not bad? What if it does pass but is vetoed; what is likely to follow? Maybe nobody knows very clearly what follows, but it does seem very relevant to judgments as to what to do about the leaders' bill. I do agree that if the leadership does NOT permit a vote on the Lee bill (or will not unless Lee, Waters et al promise to vote for theirs afterward) the progressives should all vote no.

The leaders' bill does seem to have the great merit of setting a "date certain" for total withdrawal--August 1, 2008--though it muddies that up with the cute "benchmarks" provisions: which make it look complicated and confusing, and which the president might as well certify right now, in sealed (or, who cares? unsealed) envelopes to be opened on July 1 and October 1 (if he bothers to answer at all).

BUT a) it provides for another full year of war, combat as the president decides, before a six-month withdrawal starting a year from now (instead of a nine-month withdrawal

starting right now); that's BAD.

b) the president can plausibly complain about adding the domestic features to it, instead of making them a separate package. (After all, anyone can see that the Republicans don't really have to be "forced" to accept most of these by putting them in a "must-pass" bill; they're really there to get Democrats to support a continuation of the war, though not fully on the president's terms).

c) The two interim deadlines do still have the appearance of "micromanaging" the war--even though they're meaningless--unlike the Lee bill. Whatever precedents can be dredged up for Congressional "meddling," the president's point has some merit: "Either let me and the generals run this war, or you use your constitutional power (and accept the onus) for ending it."

The Lee bill steps up to the plate and does the latter, which is the right course. It's not the very last chance, over the next twenty months, but it's getting there. (I predict: EITHER this Congress bites this bullet while still under this unpopular president--and that's unlikely, and later opportunities won't be as good as this one, in funding terms, especially if there's an attack on Iran--or else the war will go on, and on, under a Democratic president, followed by a Republican president...

Finally: Can anyone refer me to analyses or accounts of exit polling in November, 2006, in particular illuminating voting on Chafee and on the Blue Dogs? (Are they, now, representing what their own constituents wanted? Or did Rahm Emmanuel give the voters too many of such candidates to allow a majority against the war?)

Looks like a fruitful and illuminating argument coming up over the next two weeks!

to Lynn Woolley 4-9-07

1. Wf no vote on Woolley bill?

Wf Pl. not against it?
vote?

Does
who wants it moved: in 2007-8?

in 2009

Hillery who else? - later, never
NHH

Can we (then) be avoided despite AIDAC?

Will a Pres ever take initiative to end it?

Will 2/3 Cong. " " " ?

Hendlin: Does initial offering (Bush's) ^{170,000} rise was
(not Hillery - expenditure at his
level)

by Does

1.

DE:

Voters voted for a Congress that would end the war. They didn't get it.

The Dem majority includes too many - 40% -
Dems who either do not want to see the mission
war ended by the end of year or who
are unwilling to ~~pass the~~ shoulder the
responsibility for ending it.

Dems want Pers to get out of Iraq
perhaps under Rumsfeld pressure.

This won't happen.

2d best: Bush stays in - and gets blamed
but with ^{our Dem protest} full bipartisan support for it.
(Love Dems right like (3) as well as or
better than (1))

3d ~~(1st)~~: Bush stays, with Dem support -
and still gets mainly blamed.
(surely right for (3) to (4) - Dem "legal, patriotic":

~~(3)~~ (off the table): Dems forced on end.

don't blame us
for failure

What to do about signing statement?

(Don did not look good on the surge vote.)

Conclusion that should not be
determinative / conclusive
on individuals (Congo, Reps)
or Party leaders

2008
rain-cally
among blame elements
(Congo, Reps)
being 6w 5

Commander, correction,
misperceived quest / leader
loyalty
are not the only
causes of Congo / Admin
("down") behavior —
but by any or important
part.

12:40 PM 3-9-7

— What happens if the Oens' bill does not pass?

— If it is vetoed

and can't be over-ruled?

(+ what about Senate?)

Wf is it

— Suppose: Progs (Lee! Woolley!)

get

1) a vote on this amount

2) inclusion of Ken

Without (1) if wouldn't want (2)

Some
($< 15\%$)
could still
vote No,
and bill could
pass.

But if (1) ^{is voted, and "fails"} — would not vote for bill.
with (2) — and a withdrawal deadline
of 6 months after March 08?

(It's not, 9 months from April 1 —
it starts 11 months later, ends
8 months later;

Majority of public wants an
end by ^{either by} ~~no later than~~ March 08
— this is 6 months ^{or later} longer

But this does establish a deadline — imposed
of Congress —

and it could be of ^{sub-Dec} ~~Jan~~ 08 (starting July 1)
or of March 08

Demo would have made a maximal effort for 9-month withdrawal
(and rather it by threat; power...